

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Friday, May 27, 2011

As Libya Toll Mounts, US Congress Urged to Scrutinize Gadhafi's Recruitment of Mercenaries from Algeria-backed Polisario to fight NATO, Rebels

Cong. Diaz-Balart: 'Those who take up arms against US, allies must pay consequences'

Washington DC (May 27)—As international concern grows over the mounting toll of fighting in Libya, Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) is urging his colleagues in Congress to give "serious attention" to increasing evidence that members of the Algeria-backed Polisario Front are among those "being recruited and participating as mercenaries in Col. Gadhafi's murderous campaign against the Libyan people." Earlier this month, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Libyan leaders, calling their mercenary recruiting a "crime against humanity."

In a letter to fellow members, Diaz-Balart wrote, "I believe these charges, received from Libyan opposition leaders and reported to both NATO and the press against the Polisario, merit our serious attention in Congress." Diaz-Balart, who serves on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agencies, added that, "Those who take up arms against the US and its allies must be made to pay the consequences for their choices."

Diaz-Balart cited a recent column in *The Hill*, "Mercenaries in Libya: Gadhafi's Hired Terrorists," by former US Ambassador to Morocco Edward Gabriel, who wrote that "In Libya, terrorism has a different, yet disturbing face, where hired mercenaries are terrorizing the Libyan opposition." Citing reliable reports in the London Telegraph and elsewhere, Gabriel said "senior NATO officials have received information that Moammar Gadhafi is 'spending millions to hire mercenaries from the Polisario Front in Algeria,' and 'hundreds of Polisario mercenaries are being paid \$10,000 each' to join Gadhafi's military campaign against his own people."

Gabriel's column also noted that Algeria, which was one of only two Arab League nations to oppose a UN no-fly zone in Libya, has been charged by Libyan rebel leaders with "turning a blind eye" to mercenaries crossing into Libya, even allowing Algerian planes to fly mercenaries into Libya. Most recently, 500 combat-equipped light trucks have reportedly been sent to Libya from Algeria.

Despite repeated denials, the evidence and international concern continue to mount about complicity by Polisario and Algerian leaders in Gadhafi's efforts to reinforce his mercenary army. Earlier this week, the Council on Foreign Relations, "Libya: NATO's Report Card" (5/25), cited "consistent reports" on the "use of prohibited mercenaries" including from Mali and the Polisario. It said this was a factor in NATO's difficulty in enforcing an effective arms embargo in the Libyan conflict, the death toll of which is now estimated to top 15,000.

"The continued complicity by Polisario and Algerian leaders in these criminal actions is simply unacceptable," said Robert M. Holley, Executive Director of the Moroccan American Center for Policy. "They continue to deny any involvement in Gadhafi's murderous mercenary campaign, but show no willingness to stop it. I am heartened to see interest in the US Congress in holding the Polisario and Algeria accountable for their tacit, if not explicit, assent in this outrageous behavior. Indeed, there must be consequences for taking up arms against the US and its allies, in direct contravention of a UN Security Council mandate."

*** For a copy of Cong. Diaz-Balart's letter, go to:**

http://www.moroccanamericanpolicy.com/upload/media/LETTER_DearColleague%20from%20Cong.%20Mario%20Diaz-Balart%205-26-11.pdf

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Friday, June 3, 2011

Experts Warn of Risk to US if 'Arab Spring' Turns to 'Season of Discontent,' Call for US to Partner with Reformers to Spur Growth, Positive Change

Resurgent al-Qaeda, returning mercenaries, will exploit Libya chaos and arms to spread violence

Washington DC (June 3)—Foreign policy experts at two forums this week examined the seismic changes of the 'Arab Spring' and focused on the importance of US and European engagement with progressive leaders in the Middle East and North Africa for determining whether the current unrest will lead to reform, repression, or violent revolution.

Well-armed mercenaries recruited by Col. Qadhafi from Mali, the Polisario Front in Algeria, and elsewhere, and resurgent terrorists from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), are stocking up on arms from Libya and are eager to exploit unrest in the region after Osama bin Laden's death.

At an Atlantic Council symposium, "Preventing the 'Arab Spring' from Becoming the 'Season of Discontent,'" policy experts discussed the uncertain forecast and how to promote positive change in this pivotal part of the world.

Analyst Geoffrey Porter said "every country in the Middle East and North Africa is different" and must be understood on its own terms. Dr. Anouar Boukhars of McDaniels College pointed to Morocco where "reform efforts have strengthened its legitimacy," citing King Mohammed VI's March 9 speech on constitutional reforms. Dr. J. Peter Pham, moderator of the panel, said Morocco's reforms were "triggered by an inside reality and not imposed from the outside," and successful reform in other countries must be "internally driven."

Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies emphasized the importance of understanding that the 'Arab Spring' unrest is being driven by demand for economic as well as political change. Long-term solutions will require strategic choices in an uncertain climate.

Ambassador Edward Gabriel said the US and Europe can play a key role in promoting positive change. He proposed a 3-part "long-term strategy with countries that have taken reform seriously," such as Morocco and Jordan, to build partnerships for growth and "strategic dialogue" to better understand change shaping the region.

Prof. Yonah Alexander of the International Center for Terrorism Studies warned that al-Qaeda and state-sponsored terrorism are "alive and well" in the Maghreb and Sahel, where terrorist incidents have risen 500% since 9/11 and are a global as well as regional threat. He also noted the concerns expressed by NATO officials about mercenaries in Libya.

At the Association for the Study of the Middle East & Africa (ASMEA) forum, "Terrorism in North Africa After bin Laden," investigative reporter Richard Miniter warned "AQIM is taking advantage of the 'Arab Spring' to expand and grow." Professor Richard Rene Larémont of SUNY said AQIM's "narrative was weakened because change came through mass civil demonstrations, not terrorism," but that it would be reinvigorated if reforms aren't realized.

Spanish journalist Jose Maria Gil Garre, noted that AQIM has succeeded in part because it can "depend on support of military elements of the Polisario," a separatist group based in Algeria, as local guides to "carry out its arms trafficking, kidnapping, and drug-trafficking in the Sahel."

Mohammed Benhammou, of the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies, said that "600 members of the Polisario" answered the call for mercenaries in the Libyan conflict, because decades ago "Qadhafi was the father of the Polisario"—"now they are returning the favor." Benhammou warned the "Libya civil war has provided an opportunity to transfer weapons into the Sahel and AQIM."

He added that while "Morocco has been a model for the region" with its reforms, "Algeria has taken a wait and see attitude." Benhammou cited the need for "economic integration" in the region, which currently has one of the lowest cross-border trade rates in the world. Larémont added that Algeria needs to "realize it is in its interest to stop bickering with Morocco and cooperate" to address economic and security challenges facing the region.

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